

News Release

U.S. Department of Justice
United States Attorney
District of Rhode Island

**R.I. Department of Mental Health,
Retardation and Hospitals**



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Federal and state agencies join forces against methamphetamine

A coalition of federal and state agencies, joined by professionals in education, drug prevention, and drug treatment, is forming in Rhode Island to head off the spread of methamphetamine use. The working group will utilize medical, prevention, treatment, and education techniques to ward off methamphetamine use, which has devastated much of the United States and has been identified here as a small but increasing problem.

United States Attorney Robert Clark Corrente, Dr. Ellen Nelson, Director of the RI Department of Mental Health, Retardation and Hospitals (MHRH) , and David R. Gifford, MD, MPH, Director of the Rhode Island Department of Health, jointly announced the formation of the group, which follows a series of regional and national meetings about the methamphetamine problem. The announcement was made as part of National Methamphetamine Awareness Day.

“Even though we are among the last states to witness the ravages of methamphetamine addiction, we would be foolish to believe that the spread of methamphetamine will stop at our borders,” U.S. Attorney Corrente said. “What we are trying to do instead is to be aggressive and proactive with our coordination, education, prevention, and treatment efforts.”

Methamphetamine is a powerful, highly addictive stimulant drug that dramatically affects

the central nervous system. It comes in several forms, including powder, crystal, rocks, and tablets. When it comes in the crystal form it is called “crystal meth.”

Long term methamphetamine use can result in irritability, fatigue, headaches, anxiety, sleeplessness, confusion, aggressive feelings, violent rages, cravings for more meth, and depression. It can also produce a condition known as “meth mouth,” which is a serious deterioration of teeth and gums.

“To date, we have been spared the national epidemic evidenced in other parts of the country, but are beginning to hear of methamphetamine use in small numbers in targeted,” MHRH Director Nelson said. “Treatment is an important component of any successful prevention effort. Rhode Island is fortunate to have a treatment system in place that is educated on methamphetamine and able to provide the continuum of treatment services needed.”

Health Director Gifford said, "The public health significance of methamphetamine use and abuse is well documented. It is a highly addictive substance that has many negative health effects, including its effects on the brain and heart. In addition, meth users tend to engage in more risk taking behaviors, including those associated with getting HIV and sexually transmitted diseases."

Two Rhode Island men are facing federal charges for allegedly running a methamphetamine lab that the DEA and Rhode Island State Police raided last month in Coventry. That was the only significant methamphetamine criminal case to emerge in Rhode Island in the past year.

In 2005, according to DEA statistics, there were approximately 20 methamphetamine lab “incidents” in New England. By contrast, there were 2,176 such incidents in Missouri last year.

“The emergence of the super labs, replacing the ‘backyard’ labs, threatens to change the scope of the problem,” U.S. Attorney Corrente said. “It could become more urban and less rural, a trend that is already developing in some areas.”

Members of the methamphetamine working group include the U.S. Attorney’s Office, the Rhode Island Governor’s Office, the Rhode Island Attorney General, the Department of Mental Health, Retardation and Hospitals, the Department of Health, the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, the RI Attorney General’s Office, the Rhode Island Department of Education, and a coalition of substance abuse treatment agencies, including CODAC. Additional partners will also be developed in each of the disciplines involved: law enforcement, treatment, prevention, and education.

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